



Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive
County Board of Legislators



Pre-White House Conference on Aging

DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Westchester County Pre-White House Conference on Aging 2004-2005 Mini Series

Taking care of today's elderly while preparing for tomorrow's elder boom from the 2000 Westchester County Millennium Aging Project to the 2015 New York State Project

Caucus Priority Issues Report

September 2004

Sponsors

Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services
Mae Carpenter, Commissioner

Chair

Judith Z. Matson



COUNTY EXECUTIVE MESSAGE

Andrew J. Spano

Our Pre-White House Conference on Aging 2004-2005 Mini Series has created excitement throughout the county that is already rippling across the nation. As we prepare for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, the first in the Twenty-First Century, several issues must be considered. First and foremost, we must deal with profound implications connected to the aging of baby boomers, who will begin turning 60 years old in 2006.

There has never been a period in history when the senior population has been as plentiful. No matter how large that population grows, however, this county must remain a good and comfortable place for our residents to age and retire.

Our commitment to uphold our elder-friendly reputation is confirmed through sponsorship of The Pre-White House Conference on Aging initiative. Several caucuses comprising leaders from businesses, community and faith-based organizations, government and educational institutions have been formed. They are carefully examining critical aging issues, and forming recommendations and resolutions in preparation for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging in Washington D.C., which will draft new national policy on aging.

Rarely is an alliance of this type made among so many intergenerational partners.

I would like to thank the Honorary and the Executive Committees of the Pre-White House Conference on Aging for their appreciation of the crucial issues involved and their willingness to be a part of this innovative project. I would also like to thank Commissioner Mae Carpenter for her dedicated leadership; the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services for its continued support and generosity; commissioners, executive directors, directors, caucus members, community partners and staff from various county departments; the Research Advisory Committee for sharing its knowledge; and the entire Aging Network for its thoughtful input.

When you peruse this document, please keep in mind that it was prepared in a spirit of grassroots advocacy. Each Priority Issue describes an important concern expressed by caucus members working together to maintain the economic, health and social well-being of our diverse senior population.

As additional challenges come our way, we will continue to map out strategies for a bright future for our seniors and their families. The Pre-White House Conference on Aging Mini Series is the vehicle to achieve our goals.

CAN WESTCHESTER COUNTY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE FUTURE OF AGING – YOU BET WE CAN!



Andrew J. Spano

Westchester County Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mae Carpenter

The White House Conference on Aging has particular significance. It is traditionally scheduled every ten years and is the only White House Conference regularly repeated. It also provides the country, at the grass roots level, an opportunity to take part in planning for the future of aging by promoting policies geared towards improving the lives of seniors and the lives of people who care for them.

As these groups and organizations coalesce for the purpose of making important and positive changes, they are, at the same time, affirming their commitment to all older persons and their families. The Preamble to the 1995 White House Conference on Aging clearly states the underlying philosophy that binds us together:

"Aging is a part of the continuum of life. Hence policies that provide security to the elders of our society also enhance the lives of their children and grandchildren and create a bond between generations. We recognize the importance, value, and interdependence of people, regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, or sexual orientation, and seek to safeguard all persons from discrimination."

This philosophy stems from the fundamental tenets of our democratic society as defined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Since the first White House Conference on Aging in 1961 which led to the passage of the Older Americans Act, Medicaid and Medicare in 1965, poverty among the elderly has been reduced significantly. We are proud of the accomplishments of subsequent White House Conferences on Aging held in 1971, 1981 and 1995. In 1995, much of the attention and energy of the conference was deflected to saving Social Security and Medicare rather than concentrating on moving forward. However, the case was made for caregivers and the 2000 National Family Caregivers Support Program as part of the Older Americans Act was passed.

While previous conferences produced their own landmark programs, the 2005 conference will have its own unique set of priorities. Baby boomers are coming, and they will change the face of aging. They will evoke a wake-up-call more pronounced than we have seen or probably will see in a long time. With giant steps, this population will make a grand entrance into "seniordom" challenging each juncture with the dynamism it has traditionally shown. What "aging" will mean to this group as the Twenty First Century progresses, and in what manner we address their surfacing needs are key questions to which we may not have absolute answers. But one thing we do know : the future generation of aging will have very distinct characteristics and will be met with numerous challenges and opportunities as well.

The Westchester County Aging Network is already involved in activities aimed at finding solutions to these questions by identifying the future needs of today's seniors and tomorrow's elder boomers. Caucus members of Westchester's Pre-

White House Conference on Aging 2004-2005 Mini Series have returned to the classroom pursuing facts, examining trends, scanning the social, economic and political climates and basically sorting through the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government and the sources of authority.

The Caucus Priority Issues Report for Westchester's Pre-White House Conference on Aging tells a clear story, articulated by the caucuses, and based upon the guiding principles of the social, economic and well-being of older persons safeguarding their human rights. Each page is a testimony to their dedication. We call upon the different levels of government to fulfill their responsibilities to the citizens with vision, conviction and honor.

Sincerest appreciation to County Executive Andrew Spano for his inspiration and support. The County Executive committed the resources of all county departments to the caucuses. Thank you to the Board and members of the Public Private Partnership for Aging Service and its chairperson, Judy Matson, of Fuji International for their leadership, encouragement and financial support. Special gratitude to the Executive Committee Co-chairs. No one would dare to undertake such a task without the dedication and commitment of a professional staff, caring, community based partners such as businesses, service providers, colleges, universities, faith-based organizations, Advisory Council members and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to develop priorities for addressing the needs of senior citizens.

The Westchester Aging Network through its deep conviction that 'No Older Person' along with 'No Child' be left behind in the richest nation in the world is serving as trailblazers. The work of the caucuses will be distributed to all counties in the country. If all communities take advantage of this opportunity to encourage America to help all of its citizens enjoy the opportunities to fulfill their highest functional possibilities, we can make a difference.

BE VOCAL (Voices of Community Action & Leadership): LET YOUR VOICES BE HEARD.



Mae Carpenter
Commissioner

Westchester Department of Senior Programs and Services

THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE CONNECTION

Judith Z. Matson

The Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services enthusiastically supports the Pre-White House Conference on Aging 2004-2005 Mini Series. This innovative project will help to improve the quality of life for our seniors by providing them with choices and options that will foster positive outcomes.

We recognize that even in the best of times, governments and businesses are challenged to meet the needs of their constituencies and customers. This is why for nearly 15 years the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services has been a resource for promoting equity to access of programs and services for our diverse aging population.

In October 2005, when the White House Conference convenes, the agenda will be filled with a myriad of important issues for policy makers to consider. Westchester County is already developing an agenda for aging policy. Caucuses for the Pre-White House Conference on Aging are meeting regularly and examining key issues. They are taking a good look at conditions that have exacerbated inequities and caused increased vulnerability in the elderly population. They are also considering what resources will be needed by seniors, businesses and caregivers. To confirm its commitment, caucuses are also developing strategies that will strengthen our community of seniors and their families.

Westchester County has an agenda it plans to share with the nation and at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. This document represents the work that has been accomplished thus far. Vital issues have been highlighted and profiled.

The Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services applauds the hard work of the Department of Senior Programs and Services and the many community partners for their continued support, dedication and commitment to seniors and their families. We believe the return on our investment throughout the years has been exceptional.



Judith Z. Matson
Chair

Westchester Public /Private Partnership for Aging Services

Individuals should have the right to age with independence and dignity. We must do all that we can to ensure and protect these rights, so that a good quality of life is maintained throughout the age continuum. When this goal is reached, we will have fulfilled one of mankind's most important humanitarian visions.

Helping to create a National Aging Agenda

The Caucus Priority Issues Report contains the collective identification, examination and ranking of issues affecting the social, economic and health conditions of seniors and their families in Westchester and throughout the nation. The issues identified are the results of the collaborative partnerships of eighteen caucuses representing businesses, community-based organizations, government and residents. The caucuses are an integral component of the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services Pre-White House Conference on Aging (PWCoA) 2004-2005 Mini Series. These Priority Issues are instrumental in helping policy makers to set a national aging agenda with broader implications for today's seniors and tomorrow's elder boom. They are our "tool kit" for improving the quality-of-life for seniors and their families across the nation. This report represents a compendium of issues surrounding the unprecedented demands and challenges placed on society by a burgeoning older adult population, unparalleled in human history.

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BACKGROUND

WESTCHESTER'S POPULATION IS AGING

The census projections of the late nineties showed that twenty percent of Westchester County's population was over the age of 60 and the rest of the country would not reach those proportions until the year 2050. Our senior population dropped slightly in the 2000 census due to the out migration of the 60-64 year old group. However, our over 85 population grew by 24% in the last two decades.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NETWORK COALITIONS (1990s)

Westchester began planning for the aging of its population with the establishment of several network coalitions composed of advisory council members, service providers, senior leaders, advocates, representatives from the private sector and volunteers. The mission of the coalitions is to examine secondary data and continuously identify on a priority basis the unmet needs, gaps and barriers to services for seniors in Westchester County.

COLLECTION OF PRIMARY NEEDS DATA THROUGH THE MILLENNIUM AGING PROJECT (2000-2004)

Based upon the work of the coalitions, the Millennium Aging Project (MAP) was designed and implemented. Staff of the Department of Senior Programs and Services surveyed over 3,000 persons in community meetings throughout the county. The data was analyzed and presented in a report prepared by the Research Department of the Hebrew Home for Aged at Riverdale. Focus groups are presently being conducted in partnership with Fordham University.

ADVOCACY TRAINING THROUGH VOCAL: VOICES OF COMMUNITY ACTION AND LEADERSHIP (BEGAN IN 2002)

We then began training seniors and volunteers to become advocates and spokespersons through the citizen's participation arm of MAP -- VOCAL: Voices of Community Action and Leadership. Since the formation of VOCAL several hundred seniors have received training on the MAP findings and how to advocate for change.

PLANNING FOR THE ELDER BOOM WHEN BABY BOOMERS BECOME SENIORS

(2003-2004)

As we continued our efforts to keep Westchester a senior-friendly community with on-going focus groups supervised by the Fordham University's Ravazzin Center on Aging, we began planning for the explosion of our aging population with the Elder Boom Conference in November 2003.

At the conference, participants were asked to complete a "pulse" on priority needs of Westchester County seniors. The "Priority Pulse" Needs Assessment Survey, created by students at Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Work, provided us with yet another vehicle for capturing important data. Keynote speaker for the conference, Senator Hillary Clinton and our esteemed guest panel of experts shared advice concerning the future of aging and stressed the importance of intergenerational planning.

The Westchester County Pre-White House Conference on Aging 2004-2005 Mini Series was founded as a collaboration of the Department of Senior Programs and Services (DSPS), and the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services (PPP), a non-profit organization, in preparation for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

The goal is to offer informed recommendations, developed through caucuses, concerning issues on aging that will be submitted to the State White House Conference on Aging and distributed to other counties. These recommendations will be shared at a myriad of Pre-White House Conference events. The White House Conference on Aging is a decennial event that provides a forum dedicated to setting policies affecting older persons. It is also an opportunity to have intergenerational community members take part in leveraging the economic, health and social well-being of the nation's elderly.

Caucuses are made up of representatives from educational institutions, corporations, small and large businesses, community based organizations, health care facilities, and the general public. They are used as a barometer for the larger population.

Based on the assumption that caucus members are seeking to identify issues of critical importance around aging, the DSPS and PPP provided the support needed for the caucuses to perform these tasks. With their resources, the sponsors created various components to the project that provide assistance needed to accomplish the goal.

One important component is the formation of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) provide empirical information, along with literature reviews and bibliographic materials for caucus information. Research Advisory Directors are both receptacles and deliverers of data and materials for caucuses. Caucus Directors (CD's) for each issue, knowledgeable in that particular area are advising, supporting, guiding, and facilitating caucus procedures for recommendation development.

Mini-Conferences will be presented to the public in various formats. These conferences will highlight prominent issues embedded within the larger issue of concern. It is the mission of the Pre-White House Conference to not only enlighten the public but to offer the public an opportunity to take part in action designed to ameliorate concerns. This is done through open caucus memberships and electronic voting.

The Westchester County Pre-White House Conference on Aging is a whole community grass roots effort. Corporate Coordinators assist with securing site locations and financial or in-kind support for mini conferences.

Protocols and guidelines have also been defined to ensure success in each step of this initiative. Out of this ambitious work, recommendations of vital importance to effective aging policy will result, making the 2005 White House Conference on Aging the first in the Twenty-first Century to prepare for and embrace the aging of our culturally diverse population.